

parents  
teachers  
students  
& community  
are the **basics**  
of every PTA

**communications**  
resource guide  
2015-2016



**Commyyounity**



# INTRODUCTION

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Communicating is any act by which a person gives or receives information through verbal, non-verbal or written communication. Your PTA can flourish when effective communication helps to achieve the objectives of the association.

The Communications Chair is responsible for marketing the PTA: to tell the PTA story, to create eye-catching communication pieces and to develop an online presence for your PTA. Communications refers to all facets of mass media:

- Newsletter (print & online)
- Website
- Email
- Social Media
- Public Relations

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# ABOUT PTA

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## VISION

Every child's potential is a reality.

## MISSION

To make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

## PURPOSES

- To promote the welfare of children and youth in home, school, community and place of worship.
- To raise the standards of home life.
- To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth.
- To bring into closer relation the home and the school, that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the education of children and youth.
- To develop between educators and the general public such united efforts as will secure for all children and youth the highest advantages in physical, mental, social and spiritual education.

## PTA VALUES

- **Collaboration:** We will work in partnership with a wide array of individuals and organizations to broaden and enhance our ability to serve and advocate for all children and families.
- **Commitment:** We are dedicated to children's educational success, health, and well-being through strong family and community engagement, while remaining accountable to the principles upon which our association was founded.
- **Diversity:** We acknowledge the potential of everyone without regard, including but not limited to: age, culture, economic status, educational background, ethnicity, gender, geographic location, legal status, marital status, mental ability, national origin, organizational position, parental status, physical ability, political philosophy, race, religion, sexual orientation, and work experience.
- **Respect:** We value the individual contributions of members, employees, volunteers, and partners as we work collaboratively to achieve our association's goals.
- **Accountability:** All members, employees, volunteers, and partners have a shared responsibility to align their efforts toward the achievement of our association's strategic initiatives.

# POSITION RESPONSIBILITIES

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Specific duties for the Communication position will be in the Local or Council PTA’s Standing Rules. Here are some examples of items that may appear in the standing rules:

- Identify and utilize technology applications applicable and relevant to the message and audience
- Communicate relevant content in a timely, regular manner
- Keep website and/or social media posts current
- Work with community and school district Communications Director to promote PTA, its activities and sponsored events.

Review Local PTA Standing Rules for specific duties of the Communications Chair.

## BOARD STRUCTURE

There are multiple ways the communications positions can be configured on your board.

The left column in the table below shows a Standing Committee Chair for each of the major communications positions. Each of these chairs would serve as standing committee chairs on the board.

The right column shows a single overarching Communications board position (vice president or chair) with subcommittee chairs to provide the specifics. Only the communications chair would serve on the board, the subcommittee chairs would report to the communications chair, who then reports to the executive board. This structure has advantages if reaching quorum has become a problem.

Standing Committee Chairs:	Standing Committee Chair & Subcommittees:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newsletter Editor Chair</li> <li>• Webmaster Chair</li> <li>• Email/E-newsletter Chair</li> <li>• Social Media Chair</li> <li>• Public Relations (PR) Chair</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications Chair               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Newsletter Editor Subcommittee Chair</li> <li>○ Webmaster Subcommittee Chair</li> <li>○ Email/E-newsletter Subcommittee Chair</li> <li>○ Social Media Subcommittee Chair</li> <li>○ Public Relations (PR) Subcommittee Chair</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Choose one of the many variations that serve your PTA best keeping in mind that the format is based on volunteer availability and ability. Two or more of the above responsibilities can be combined to form one position. An example would be combining the newsletter editor chair and the email/e-newsletter chair positions.

# PROCEDURE BOOK

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A procedure book serves as a permanent record of activities and ensures an ongoing PTA program of work. It contains materials and information needed for the job. When compiling your procedure book, ask yourself, “If I knew nothing about the job, could I do it with this procedure book?”

## **A PROCEDURE BOOK:**

- is vital to the effectiveness of an on-going chair;
- is a record of a year’s plans and activities;
- keeps you organized and focused; and
- makes tasks easier for those who follow you.

## **HOW TO COMPILE A PROCEDURE BOOK**

- Use a loose-leaf folder or notebook.
- Separate sections with tabbed dividers.
- Include Suggested Table of Contents (see following).
- Additionally, keep all correspondence and records in CD and flash drive format to keep better records of past and current activities.
- Note: Be sure to turn over the procedure book and all CD/flash drive records of past works to the new chair at the completion of your term in office.

## **SUGGESTED TABLE OF CONTENTS**

### **DIRECTORY**

- Your name, address, telephone number and year served
- Address of Texas PTA Office and telephone number
- Address of National PTA Office and telephone number
- Name, address and telephone number of Local PTA president and board members
- Name, addresses and telephone numbers of Council and Texas PTA officers or chairs with comparable responsibilities
- Names, addresses and telephone numbers of committee members
- Resource people, related agencies and organizations in the community

### **JOB DESCRIPTION**

- Responsibilities of your job
- Month by month “To Do” List

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## **PLAN OF WORK**

- Copy of approved Plan of Work

## **FINANCIAL REPORTS/FORMS**

- Local PTA Budget
- Treasurer's Reports
- Voucher forms
- Tax exempt forms
- In-depth breakdown of expenditures for your job

## **BYLAWS/STANDING RULES**

- A current copy of the Local PTA bylaws and Standing Rules (a copy of these items can be requested from Texas PTA)

## **EVENTS, PROJECT, PROGRAM**

- List on separate pages each event, project and/or programs including dates, responsibilities, expenses and an evaluation form.

## **REPORTS**

- Reports – include reports given by your office (list each title separately)
- Forms – include all forms sent by your office for awards at Council, Texas or National PTA

## **VOLUNTEER HOURS**

- Use a calendar to keep track of your hours and turn them into the volunteer coordinator.

## **PTA MATERIALS**

- Handouts and updates received from Texas PTA, Council and Local PTAs
- Agendas and minutes

## **EVALUATIONS**

- What were your successes? Why?
- What projects failed? Why?
- What person, groups, materials were most helpful?

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- This section should contain any recommendations to your successors.

# PLAN OF WORK

At the beginning of each term all board members are required per the bylaws to complete and present a Plan of Work to the board for approval.

A Plan of Work is a detail list of all goals and expenses that a board member has for their term of office. Plans of Work must be approved before any expenses can be incurred for a position.



## Plan of Work Plan de Trabajo

**Officer/Chairman Name:**  
(Nombre de Oficial/Presidente de Junta) Nancy Newsletter

**Position:** Newsletter Editor **Year:** 20XX – 20XX  
(Posición) (Año)

*Reproduce as needed for the appropriate number of goals.*  
(Se puede reproducir para metas adicionales.)

<b>Responsibilities/-Duties:</b> (Responsabilidades)	Edit, compile and distribute PA newsletter. Provide PTA communications for PTA board.	<b>Committee Members:</b> (Miembros del Comité)	School secretary, principal, Kindergarten parent, 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade parent
<b>Goal:</b> (Meta)	Ensure newsletter is current, information is pertinent and timely.	<b>Evaluation Process:</b> (Proceso de Evaluación)	Check with board, membership and staff to ensure newsletter information is relevant and timely.

<b>Specific Action Steps</b> (Proceso Especifico de Acción)	<b>Start Date</b> (Fecha de Empezio)	<b>Completion Date</b> (Fecha de Terminación)	<b>Budget</b> (Presupuesto)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collect monthly articles from board, teachers and staff. Include general PTA articles from Council/Texas/National PTA</li> <li>Compile and generate newsletter to distribute by the first of each month</li> <li>Generate newsletter for special events</li> </ul>	June 1	May 31	\$250 (copy charges for parents who request a hardcopy newsletter)
Act as communication liaison between our Local PTA and Council/Texas/National PTAs for gathering newsletter content	June 1	May 31	\$0

<b>Resources:</b> (Recursos)	Board members, school secretary, teachers, room parents ,principal and staff to provide content for newsletter.
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# PLAN OF WORK



## Plan of Work Plan de Trabajo

**Officer/Chairman Name:** William Webmaster  
(Nombre de Oficial/Presidente de Junta)

**Position:** Webmaster **Year:** 20XX – 20XX  
(Posición) (Año)

*Reproduce as needed for the appropriate number of goals.*  
(Se puede reproducir para metas adicionales.)

<b>Responsibilities/-Duties:</b> (Responsabilidades)	Update and maintain our Local PTA website.	<b>Committee Members:</b> (Miembros del Comité)	Kindergarten parent, 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade parent
<b>Goal:</b> (Meta)	Ensure website and calendar are current, and information is pertinent and timely.	<b>Evaluation Process:</b> (Proceso de Evaluación)	Check with board, membership and staff to ensure website and calendar information is relevant and timely.

<b>Specific Action Steps</b> (Proceso Especifico de Acción)	<b>Start Date</b> (Fecha de Empiezo)	<b>Completion Date</b> (Fecha de Terminación)	<b>Budget</b> (Presupuesto)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review web hosting service and domain registration (renew if needed)</li> <li>Update PTA website with the latest info and change requests</li> <li>Respond to or forward questions from the “Contact Us” email on website</li> <li>Maintain all domain-related email accounts</li> </ul>	June 1	May 31	\$50
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain calendar in a timely fashion, keep data current</li> <li>Reply to confirm with those who request an event be added to the calendar.</li> </ul>	June 1	May 31	\$0
Act as the liaison between our PTA and Council/Texas/National PTAs for website content	June 1	May 31	\$0
Use the website to contain data, tools and templates (when not in conflict with Texas or National PTA). Example: photos, expense and deposit forms, etc.	June 1	May 31	\$0

<b>Resources:</b> (Recursos)	Board members, principal, teachers, staff and room parents to provide web content.
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# GETTING STARTED

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The Communications Chair position could be one of the most exciting and fun positions on the PTA board, and all of the options should inspire, not overwhelm. Discuss with the entire board the ways in which you plan to communicate throughout the year, who you plan to communicate with, and in what areas you plan to communicate about. This will give you a strategy for the year, a roadmap to complete your plan of work, and ideas of how you can use your communication pieces to disseminate information and promote events.

## MASS MEDIA

Mass Media is the use of media technologies to reach a large audience. The Communication Chair will have a variety of ways in which to communicate information. These various methods represent the major categories of your overall communications plan.

- Conventional/traditional methods:
  - Print (newsletter, newspaper)
  - Television, radio
- Internet-based methods:
  - E-newsletter
  - Email
  - Website
  - Social Media

## AUDIENCE

When developing your communications strategy, the most important question is “Who is my audience?” The answer to that question will drive all content, and will help answer the next 2 questions:

1. What is the intent of the communications?

*If the audience is all parents, is the intent to recruit new PTA members (increase membership)? If the audience is the PTA, is the intent to communicate PTA events/training/advocacy/etc.?*

2. What information is relevant to communicate?

*If the audience is elementary school parents and the topic is safety, an article on Halloween safety is probably more relevant than a texting-and-driving topic. Both are great articles, but one is more relevant and more likely to be read by that audience.*

Other questions to answer: How should your communications be delivered? What are the demographics of your campus? Is everyone ‘connected’? Would they prefer a paper newsletter or a mobile app? The answers to these questions mark the difference between a successful communications plan and an unsuccessful one. If you’re unsure, don’t guess: survey your audience and plan accordingly.

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## PROCESS

The process of acquiring and distributing information is basically the same regardless of the communication method -- whether you're doing a website or newsletter, the process doesn't vary much.

The first step in the process is to acquire content. As a communications chair, your responsibility is to acquire content, not necessarily to create it. You should edit the article (for punctuation, grammar, spelling, etc.), but not re-write the article for the submitter. Content can come from a variety of sources: officers, chairs, teachers/staff, school district, State/National PTA articles (which are freely distributable). It's important to give your sources a deadline for their submissions which will give them ample opportunity to create content and give you ample opportunity to edit and deliver.

Your distribution method and frequency are also part of your overall communications plan. How are you going to deliver your newsletter – printed copies or electronically? How often are you going to send it out? There are pitfalls to too much or too little communication – the optimum frequency is dependent on your audience. Research indicates that Wednesday and Sunday nights are the best time to distribute correspondence.

It's important to have others check your work – you may have missed some typos or edited a different meaning into someone's article. At a minimum, allow the principal, president and all contributors to review the information, and give them a deadline for completion. Check Standing Rules for approval process.

## PRIVACY

Webster's defines privacy as "freedom from unauthorized intrusion." As Communications Chair, it is important that you do not publish personal information or images without proper consent. This information includes:

- Name
- Address
- Phone number, email address, Facebook ID, etc.

Privacy is a growing concern in this digital age, and it is important that your PTA adheres to your school district's privacy policy. Consult with the district's Communications Director for the details.

Review your communications to make sure personal information is not being disclosed. And ensure the individuals have given their permission to use their image, name and contact information. If in doubt, ask them! Consult with your school district's photo release policy. If the PTA documents and publications are not covered in this release, you will need to obtain photo releases before publishing or posting photos with children.

Rephrase your message by using more generic terminology – "students" rather than "Mrs. Trout's 1st Grade Class." A lot also depends on the scope of your audience – if your target audience is only your campus, you'll have more leeway than if it is the entire community. And make use of royalty-free images. Students running toward a school bus conveys the same message as OUR specific students running toward our school district's school bus.

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## CONTENT

Content is ‘king’ – pictures and charts are irrelevant if the message is off the mark. Content requirements are basically the same across all communications disciplines.

What makes a story newsworthy? Before you begin planning articles, make sure the article topics are newsworthy. The following elements may serve as guidelines in judging newsworthiness:

- **Timeliness** - People are interested in current events and news that is being reported for the first time.
- **Location** - People are interested in news that occurs close to home or in their immediate area.
- **Significance** - Events which affect the lives of others are newsworthy. The greater the effect, the more newsworthy it becomes.
- **Human Interest** - People are interested in others, so stories that appeal to the emotions attract readers.

Some content, like meeting minutes, bylaws, budgets and financial reports should not be included if the communication is accessed by non-members. These items can be included if PTA members are the only ones who receive the items. Our bylaws define “membership” and Roberts Rules of Order states that only “members” have the rights to these documents.

For rules on grammar, spelling, punctuation and usage, you may purchase the ‘**Associated Press Style Guide**’ via iTunes, and in print. In most cases, it does not need to be the latest version so a used book is perfectly fine.

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” Adding a visual to any publication or print material can make it pleasing to the eye, but graphics need to add value to a piece as well. Only use high-quality photographs or clip art and make sure they are relevant to the piece. If your article is about health and nutrition, a photo of a child blowing bubbles does not fit the subject matter. Make sure you are the copyright holder or have been given permission by the owner (and have collected the proper photo release documentation before you distribute.) Royalty-free images are exempt from this requirement and are great sources for generic pics. Check these sites out:

- iStock Photo ([www.istockphoto.com](http://www.istockphoto.com))
- Getty Images ([www.gettyimages.com](http://www.gettyimages.com))

# BRANDING

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## ELEVATOR SPEECH

PTA is a grassroots organization made up of parents, teachers and others around the state who have an interest in children, families and schools with three primary objectives in mind: parent involvement, parent education and advocacy. PTA membership is as diverse as Texas is in cultures, education levels and parenting skills. By joining PTA, a member becomes part of the largest child advocacy organization in the state with over 500,000 members across Texas.

## WHAT IS BRANDING?

Branding is defined as the process involved in creating a unique name and image for a product (goods or services) in the consumers' mind, through advertising campaigns with a consistent theme.

## CONSISTENCY IS KEY

In 2001, National PTA adopted a new logo to bring uniformity in image and message to all PTAs. Previously, thousands of different logos, advertising messages, and colors represented the PTA. Now, PTA has a standard logo and tagline that creates a consistent message, helps unify all PTAs and strengthens our image.

Establishing and maintaining a strong brand identity is critical to increasing recognition and setting PTA apart from the competition. National PTA has established guidelines for the proper use of the PTA name, logo and tagline, “everychild. onevoice.®” The success of our PTA brand identity system depends on all PTAs' adherence to the established guidelines. The following guidelines are provided to establish a uniform, effective system for PTAs to use when presenting the name, logo and tagline of the PTA. It will help PTAs maintain a consistent, visual style and brand identity for all PTA-produced materials.

## USING THE PTA NAME AND LOGO

Specific information on how to use the PTA Logo and Tagline – including proper and specific usage of color, font and size -- can be found here. And the National PTA website contains directions on how to create an official logo for your own PTA!:

Our PTA name is important—only by insisting that all PTAs use the same logo, in the same way, can we guarantee our name recognition will continue to grow and be protected under trademark law.

- As a licensee of the National PTA, you are entitled to use the PTA® or PTSA® name. While the name PTA is recognized widely and many people still think it is a generic term that can be used to describe any parent group or school association, the name “PTA” and “PTSA” are registered service marks of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers. A service mark has the same legal status as a trademark. The distinction is that a service mark is used for services and trademarks used for commercial products.
- The symbol ® designates that the PTA name has been registered with the federal government and may not be used by organizations not affiliated with the National PTA.
- Not only is the name “PTA,” a registered service mark, but the design treatment of the logo (slanted PTA) also has been registered as an official service mark of the association. In addition, the tagline “everychild. onevoice.®” is a registered service mark of National PTA.

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- Always publish, print or speak the name of your PTA in a consistent manner—be consistent in the typeface or font you use, how your logo appears and the color you use. You need to be consistent in order to build an identity for your PTA—one that is recognizable and continues to build awareness of your PTA.
  - Always reproduce the PTA logo and tagline with their registered service mark symbols. Graphic files for these logos are provided on the PTA website for download.
  - The PTA logo and tagline should always be shown the same color. The official color of the PTA is a dark, slate blue. The PTA name, logo and tagline should always appear together in the same color—either in the official blue, all black or white. Never print your PTA name in a different color than the logo or tagline. For professional printing purposes, the ink color is Pantone Matching System® color 541.

## **CORRECT USE OF PTA NAME**

The following names are all registered service marks of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers:

- National Congress of Parents and Teachers®
- Parent Teacher Association® (should not be hyphenated)
- Parent-Teacher-Student Association ® (should be hyphenated)
- National PTA®
- PTA®
- PTSA®

## **CORRECT USE OF TEXAS PTA NAME**

- The Texas Congress of Parents and Teachers should be referred to as Texas PTA on all references.
- When referring to the Vision, Mission or Purposes of PTA, always capitalize these when part of a formal title. When saying “...be well-informed about the PTA vision, mission, purpose, policies, benefits, ...”, lowercase is acceptable.

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## CORRECT FORMS OF ABBREVIATION AND PUNCTUATION

- PTA , PTSA (no periods)
- PTAs, PTSAs (plural, no apostrophe)
- PTA's, PTSA's (singular possessive, use an apostrophe)
- PTAs', PTSAs' (plural possessive, apostrophe follows the "s")

## INCORRECT USES OF LOGO

- Do not alter the spacing between the letters in the logo artwork provided.
- Do not cut the letters apart and stack them vertically. This makes the PTA logo difficult to read and hard to recognize.
- Do not make a pattern by repeating the logo or use as a decorative element.

## TAGLINE

The tagline "**everychild. onevoice.**" is always lowercase text and centered below the PTA logo.

National PTA has officially translated the tagline into Spanish as follows: *cadaniño. unavoz.*<sup>®</sup>

The tagline in Spanish should be typed and printed exactly the same way as the English version. Use only Times Roman or Times New Roman font as follows:

*every* - typed in italic, followed by no space

**child.** - typed in bold with a period, followed by one space

*one* - typed in italic, followed by no space

**voice.**<sup>®</sup> - typed in bold with a period, followed by a registration mark.

The tagline should look like this:

*everychild. onevoice.*<sup>®</sup> or *cadaniño. unavoz.*<sup>®</sup>

## INCORRECT USES OF TAGLINE

- Do not alter the spacing between words or capitalize the words in the tagline.
- Do not alter the size or relationship of the tag- line to the PTA logo.
- Do not set the tagline above the logo.

## INTERNAL ELEMENTS

- Lowercase references that are widely used generic terms: board of directors, executive board, president, secretary, chairs, etc.
- Capitalize internal elements of an association when they have names that are not widely used generic terms or when they are made proper nouns. Examples: Texas PTA Board of Directors, Austin City Council of PTAs, etc.
- Capitalize the internal elements of the association: Local PTA, Council PTA.

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## TITLES

In general, confine capitalization to formal titles used directly before an individual's name. A title standing alone or separated by commas should be lowercased unless it refers to a high official and special respect is intended.

Examples:

- The Council PTA president attended all Local PTA events.
- Within the Arlington ISD Council, there are approximately 51 Local PTAs.
- Sue Jones is the Youth Protection Chair. The Healthy Lifestyles Chair is Sue Jones.
- The parliamentarian for Texas PTA is Sue Jones. The crowd welcomed President Sue Jones.
- Sue Jones, Texas PTA President, attended the meeting.

## NAMES OF COMMITTEES

Capitalize committee names, including “committee” if it is part of the proper name. Examples:

- The Parenting Committee is chaired by Sue Jones.
- Sue Jones, Cultural Arts Chair, attended the meeting. Sue Jones, chair of Cultural Arts, attended the meeting.
- Cultural Arts Chair Sue Jones attended the meeting.
- Sue Jones is chair of the Legislative Action Committee.
- The following committees met after the board meeting: Educational Relations, Resources and Youth Protection.

## REFERENCES TO PTA PUBLICATIONS

- Italicize (or underline when italics are not possible) formal references to PTA publications.
- Examples: Texas PTA's *The Voice*, Texas PTA Resource Guides, Texas PTA Under the Dome
- Italicize *The Voice* when mentioned informally without including Texas PTA.
- Do not italicize or capitalize references to PTA publications if formal titles are not used.
- Examples: the resource guide, Texas PTA's legislative e-newsletter

## PTA EVENTS

Capitalize events and awards that are specific to PTA. Do not capitalize events when used generically.

Examples:

- Phoebe Apperson Hearst Awards
- Texas PTA Summer Leadership Seminar
- Texas PTA Family Engagement Conference



# MEDIA RELATIONS

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Print, television and radio reporters are looking for news. If PTA has newsworthy information, they want it. When working with the media, it is important to keep in mind that they have a job to do--to provide news to the community objectively.

To journalists, newsworthy means timeliness, conflict, prominence, proximity, significance and human interest. Before you contact the media with your news, make sure it fits into one of these categories--better yet, all of them.

- Reporters like to break stories, not report on yesterday's news. Ask yourself, "What is the issue today?" or "What is happening in the near future?"
- Conflicts or disruptions always attract the media. What PTA-supported or proposed issues cause debate?
- The more prominent a person, the more newsworthy the information becomes. Significant events affect the lives of others. The greater the effect, the more newsworthy it becomes. Reporters are interested in feature stories that appeal to the emotions of their readers or audience.

## BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP

It is in PTA's best interest to befriend the media by meeting their deadlines, providing them with newsworthy information and displaying an appreciative attitude regarding their coverage, whether great or small. It is the Local PTA's responsibility to provide the media with interesting, newsworthy and timely information.

Some tips for effective media relations are:

- Get to know reporters personally.
- Get to know your school district public relations officer personally.
- Write news releases in journalistic style.
- Meet reporters' deadlines.
- Be selective in coverage: present facts and newsworthy material.
- Be a credible resource for reporters.
- Do not complain because of lack of coverage; ask media how to make information more newsworthy.
- Keep in mind that radio is a good source for spreading the PTA message.
- Send information of special events and/or PSAs to media at least three weeks in advance.
- Request PSA production from stations at least two months in advance.
- Request station personnel promotions/appearances three to six months in advance.

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Start building a relationship with your school district public relations person. Get to know their system for submitting press releases and their deadlines. In large districts, you may have a better chance of your news item being published if they are submitted by the school district PR person.

Most school districts have a public relations officer whose job is to submit news releases to the local media. They compile all newsworthy items for the school district to submit at one time, meeting the local media deadlines. The press is more likely to pay attention to releases from the school district than many individual ones from every Local PTA. Therefore, it can be beneficial to establish a good working relationship with the public relations officer in your school district. Once you establish a relationship with the media and your public relations officer, it is important to meet their deadlines and submit news items and photos, clearly labeled with all people identified, to one or the other, but not both.

Do not be intimidated by newspaper, television or radio reporters. Their job is simply to provide the community with the most newsworthy information. Your job is to be a credible, available resource.

In striving to build a professional rapport with reporters, remember that they may be forced to write an unflattering story about PTA. Always be a credible and available resource for the media during good times and bad times. **And, never go “off the record.”**

## **SUBMITTING PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS (PSAs)**

Written public service announcements should be submitted to radio stations’ public service directors at least two weeks prior to targeted airtime.

PSAs for television should be submitted to television stations’ public service directors approximately one month prior to targeted airtime. If production is needed, submit the written PSA two months in advance. Television stations sometimes provide free production to nonprofit organizations. So, schedule an appointment, and request their help. You should also contact the station beforehand to determine the required format for submission (tape, CD, DVD, etc.)

Submit PSAs in various lengths. A 10 second PSA is approximately 25 words; 20 seconds, 45 words; 30 seconds, 65 words; and 60 seconds, 125 words.

# NEWSLETTERS

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Many PTAs use newsletters as the primary means of disseminating information to its membership. Informing readers (members and non-members) of PTA successes and activities will gain increased participation and support from the community, and will, therefore, increase membership.

Although newsletters may be formatted in many shapes, sizes and forms, remember that a newsletter, just as any publication, portrays an image of PTA. It is very likely that the Local or Council PTA newsletter will be the only PTA publication some will ever see. Newsletters are most effective when distributed regularly (monthly, biweekly). They can also be distributed as needed to address special topics.

Newsletter types include:

- **Traditional Print:** The type of newsletter that goes home in a ‘Tuesday folder’ or available in the office.
- **Hybrid:** Newsletters created to be printed, but are converted to an electronic format and either posted on a website or attached to an email.
- **E-newsletters:** Newsletters that reside online. They are typically created with a mass-email or website editing tool. The advantages of this method are no printing costs along with all the conventions of the internet (images, links, resources, etc.) An example of this would be a headline with a link to the body of the article.

## KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

The key to a successful newsletter is that it must appeal to its audience. If the newsletter does not attract the reader, then he most likely will go uninformed of important upcoming PTA activities.

Keep in mind that people want to know what is happening in PTA at the present time. The purpose of the newsletter is to give readers current news. Make stories interesting, newsworthy and free from insiders’ language. If a reader does not understand the material, then he will not participate in the activity.

## SUGGESTED DISTRIBUTION

- Parents of all students
- Churches
- Local, Council PTAs
- School board members
- Other state PTAs
- School staff
- Past PTA presidents
- Administrative personnel
- Community
- Retired teacher groups and individuals
- Non-parents
- Senior citizen centers
- News media
- Local libraries
- Civic and service clubs
- Business and industry leaders
- Chambers of commerce
- Civic leaders, including mayor, city council members, and police chief
- Professional offices

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## **SUGGESTED TOPICS**

- School & PTA-sponsored events
- Projects
- Clothes Closet, etc.
- Competitions (Sports, fine arts, etc.)
- School activities
- Emergency procedures, inclement weather policy, etc.
- Community activities
- Teacher Bios
- New or recommended library books
- Parenting articles
- Student concern issues
- Child safety information
- Committee reports from PTA officers
- Teacher’s column
- “Letters from Parents” column
- How to Navigate Student Pick-up
- Awards & Recognition
- Kudos to students, teachers, staff, school
- New members
- Recognition of contributions
- Resource information
- Column of Texas or National PTA news
- Information from the principal
- PTA president’s column

## **FORMATTING PRINT NEWSLETTERS**

- Use a two- or three-column grid.
- Use the same type style throughout the newsletter.
- Be consistent with type style and size in headlines.
- Enlarge and reduce headlines only for emphasis.
- Boldface and capitalize headlines.
- Use white space to create emphasis and to make reading easier.
- Crop photos. Remember to size photos according to the two- or three-column grid.
- Do not place a graphic element on the page if it has no relevance.
- Be consistent with types of graphics. Do not mix styles.
- Place the most important element in the upper left or lower right portion of the page.
- Use short paragraphs.

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- Balance copy. Inside pages should be designed as one layout, not two separate pages.
  - Place the masthead in the same location for each issue. (The masthead is the publication box consisting of the PTA's name; school; president's name, address and telephone number; date and volume number.)
  - Contact the Texas PTA Office for information regarding logos for Local, Council PTA newsletters or help with layout and formatting.
  - List officers' names and titles, including editor, on the inside cover or back page. Format consistently.

## **FORMATTING E-NEWSLETTERS**

- Keep the design simple. Stick to basic text & images.
- Keep the image sizes small.
- Designate a test person and send a test email before you send the real newsletter. Have this person review layout, photo quality, spacing issues, etc.
- Include the line, "If you have issues viewing this email, go to....," and then link to a newsletter webpage on your site.
- If you publish your newsletter in PDF format, don't attach it directly to the newsletter email. Instead, upload the PDF on your site and include a link in the newsletter content. Don't have Adobe Acrobat Writer? Download the freeware CutePDF to convert Office documents into PDF format. [www.cutepdf.com](http://www.cutepdf.com)
- Make the design pleasing to the reader, and do not make the mistake of trying to cram as much information as possible onto each page. This makes the page look cluttered.
- Do not be afraid of white space. Leaving a wider margin and some blank space at the top and bottom of a page will make it easier to read and gives the e-newsletter design a more pleasant look.
- Consider using third-party providers for your e-newsletter. These companies maintain your email list and have templates to aid in the design. Read more about email utilities in the Email section below.
- If you send the email from your account and design in a program like Microsoft Word, you will need to copy and paste the text inside the body of your email after designing. Do not use attachments. Read more in the email section below.

# EMAIL

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Email can be a powerful mechanism to provide immediate information to a large audience.

Typical usage includes:

- Distributing newsletters (link and/or attachment)
- Sending e-blasts – short, time-critical announcements

There are a variety of mass email applications available, including:

- Constant Contact (fee-based) [www.constantcontact.com](http://www.constantcontact.com)
- Emma (fee-based) [www.myemma.com](http://www.myemma.com)
- Mail Chimp (free!) [www.mailchimp.com](http://www.mailchimp.com)
- Benchmark (free to PTAs!) <http://www.benchmarkemail.com/sponsorships/pta>

The fees charged are based on the number of email addresses in its contact list. The free utilities provide similar functionality and ease-of-use.

**Important:** Try to avoid using personal email accounts to send mass mailings. It's not uncommon for an internet provider to suspend an account it suspects is sending spam, and sending emails to hundreds of recipients in a day triggers that suspicion. But if this method is your only option, make sure you blind copy all recipients in order to avoid disclosing everyone's email address.

# WEBSITES

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The benefits to having a website are extensive, and effective use of a website is crucial to a PTA's communication and public relations plan.

## **BENEFITS OF A WEBSITE**

Unlike printed materials, websites can be changed on a minute-by-minute basis, if needed. Development, design and editing time needed for print materials, (but not a website) help make websites even more attractive. Print materials can be made available for download on the website, too (which can help lower or eliminate printing costs).

### **INSTANT AVAILABILITY**

A website provides a visual element and is always available to anyone with Internet access, unlike print, television or radio advertising. The website can provide information and answer questions without a phone call or personal visit. A website is more engaging when designed correctly and easy to use.

### **EASY TO FIND**

Between 80 to 95 percent of all website traffic usually comes from search engines; even the majority of the Texas PTA website's traffic comes through a search engine. A website is a cost effective way to advertise to the masses who are interested in PTA and what it has to offer.

## **HOW TO CREATE A WEBSITE**

One of the best things you can do for the visibility and accessibility of your website is to register a domain -- your PTA name .org or .com. 'org' because your PTA is a non-profit entity. 'com' because, frankly, not everyone will remember .org plus you don't want anyone else registering the .com domain and posting decidedly non-PTA content. Domain registration typically costs less than \$20 yearly. Register the PTA as the owner of the domain (not the individual registering the domain). GoDaddy is a popular and easy-to-use domain registrar ([www.GoDaddy.com](http://www.GoDaddy.com))

Many domain registrars provide free email forwarding as part of the domain purchase. With email forwarding, you can set up position-specific email addresses (like [President@GreatPTA.org](mailto:President@GreatPTA.org)) that will forward email to an account of your choosing, and thus allows you to post an email address publicly without disclosing a home email address.

When creating or maintaining a website, you'll determine where in 'cyberspace' your website will reside. This is the 'host'. There are many web hosting services from which to choose with a variety of fee structures to match -- including free sites! So it's a good idea to review your needs and match them to a service. Many school districts will provide webspace to PTAs by campus at no charge. One typical drawback to this scenario is that district personnel are usually the only ones authorized to make updates, meaning the PTA may not have direct access to their own site and must rely on the schedule and benevolence of the staff member.

Where to start? Find a great website and pattern yours after it! Create and update your website with maintainability in mind. Be mindful of what software and skills will be required of the next webmaster and try to stick with the tools most people already have.

In terms of tools: pricey, specialized web-development software is practically a thing of the past for PTA webmasters. Most hosting services provide online website development software to develop and maintain a website from anywhere on any computer. Many tools, like WordPress, allow "plug-ins", which are specialized software applications that can be incorporated into a website, like calendars or surveys.

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Some content, like meeting minutes, Bylaws, budgets and financial reports should be in a password-protected members-only area on your website. This password should be changed yearly to coincide with a new membership year.

## **WEBSITE FORMAT AND DESIGN SUGGESTIONS**

### **EASE OF USE**

The graphics, background and use of color on your website should be appealing and consistent. PTA highly recommends use of Arial/Helvetica and Times Roman typeface families to keep the website legible. To make sure the webpage is easy to navigate, keep the information limited to one subject per page and make sure the pages are organized in a consistent manner. Identify your PTA on all pages of the website.

### **CONTENT**

Be sure to include information about membership and how to join your PTA. Update your site with a current meeting schedule and contact information for your PTA's Board with your position specific email addresses (president@yourpta.org). It is easy to advertise your volunteer opportunities here as well.

This is the best place to tell why joining PTA matters. You can post PTA's theme and goals for the year, legislative updates, as well as ongoing projects like a clothes closet. Be sure to include the PTA Vision, Mission and Purposes. Don't forget to recognize students and teachers who are doing great things.

### **LINKS**

Include links to National, Texas and Council PTA websites, as well as your school and/or school district's webpage. Also include any links relevant to current PTA activities.



# SOCIAL MEDIA

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Social media is defined as using web-based technologies, primarily Internet and mobile-based tools, to allow the creation and exchange of content for sharing and discussing information. Programs like Facebook and Twitter make it easy to exchange information between specific groups of people.

Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, exchange and comment on contents among themselves in virtual communities. It introduces substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals.

Many people rely on social media as their means of communication, transcending phone/email/text. And it's easily accomplished with a Smartphone. Thus it is a powerful communication tool for PTAs. Your PTA board should determine who is authorized to post using social media. And they should determine whether individuals can post back on the PTAs site (as opposed to read-only privileges). Choose wisely!

A few examples of social media are:

- **Blogs** – allows PTAs to tell their stories, break news, comment on breaking news, and share resources quickly.
- **Facebook** – free advertising and promotion for your local PTA. It allows you to share information with your members, it will enable you to start conversations on various topics, and it gives them the chance to share with their friends as well
- **Twitter** – used primarily for sharing about a product, brand or a program. It is also used to make announcements and share breaking news.
- **YouTube** – lets people upload online videos and participate in free video-sharing, commenting, liking, and re-posting.
- **Instagram** – lets people upload online photos, much in the same way as YouTube is used for videos
- **Pinterest** – a pinboard-style social photo sharing website that allows users to create and manage theme-based image collections such as events, interests, hobbies, and more.

These tools can be used in a variety of ways, and the best part is that these tools are free! Social media gives you an alternative to communicating by allowing the following:

- Announcements
- PTA Meeting Schedules
- Programs Information
- Events
- Group Discussions

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For PTAs, the purpose of using social media is to:

- Promote PTA, membership or PTA events
- Direct traffic to the PTA website for more information, encouraging participation and membership
- Promote best practices
- Provide accurate, relevant and up-to-date information

## **CONTENT**

The PTA executive board shall approve the site and assign the responsibility for monitoring content. Content on all social media outlets used by the PTA shall be civil, relevant and inclusive. And shall not contain member-only information (like bylaws, minutes, financials). Adhere to the PTA policies: noncommercial, nonsectarian, nonpartisan.

## **TIPS FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA**

- Familiarize yourself with the Texas PTA Social Media Policy which may be found on the Texas PTA website.
- Familiarize yourself with the National PTA Social Media Tipsheets.
- Familiarize yourself with the National PTA Standards in general, and “Communication Effectively” in particular.
- Develop a clear objective for each post.
- Consider the audience and make sure the post is appropriate for that audience. If not, reword your message.
- Make sure you have consistent quality content. You want to make sure your audience wants to hear from PTA!
- Remember that you are using social media as a resource. Take care to post content of value to the user and not only marketing and promotion messages for PTA.
- Use social media to link to your Local PTA website or to the Texas PTA website.

# PUBLIC RELATIONS

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PTA's definition of Public Relations is "winning public recognition and support for PTA goals and programs, while meeting the needs of a targeted audience."

Public Relations involves creating and cultivating relationships with traditional media: print, radio and television. It is in PTA's best interest to befriend the media by meeting their deadlines, providing them with newsworthy information and displaying an appreciative attitude regarding their coverage, whether great or small. It is the Local PTA's responsibility to provide the media with interesting, newsworthy and timely information.

You can broaden support of your Local or Council PTA by becoming involved in your business and civic community. The most important factor is that the partnership is a good match for the business or community group, as well as for the PTA, the school and the students.

## INTERNAL PUBLIC RELATIONS

Before trying to promote PTA to the community, make sure members are informed and have a positive image of PTA. Internal public relations must be successful before members will sell PTA to their friends.

If you are not telling the good news about your PTA, no one else will. Each Local PTA has the responsibility of attracting members, and the best way to do this is to communicate PTA successes and to portray an image of child advocacy to the community. PTA is the largest child advocacy organization in the nation, but it is through the efforts of the Local PTA that children's environments in the home, school, community and place of worship are improved.

People know PTA through the image the Local PTA portrays in their community. It is important to remember that people form opinions of PTA, not only by attending PTA meetings and programs, but also by reading PTA newsletters, visiting the Local PTA website, noticing PTA participation in community activities and reading about PTA successes in the newspaper.

The bottom line is that exposure stirs interest and interest builds memberships and support for your association.

## SCHOOL DISTRICT PUBLIC RELATIONS

Most school districts have a public relations or communications officer whose job is to submit news releases to the local media. They compile all newsworthy items for the school district to submit at one time, meeting the local media deadlines. The press is more likely to pay attention to releases from the school district than many individual ones from every Local PTA. Therefore, it can be beneficial to establish a good working relationship with the public relations officer in your school district. Once you establish a relationship with the media and your public relations officer, it is important to get to know their system for submitting information and to meet their deadlines and submit news items and photos, clearly labeled with all people identified, to one or the other, but not both.

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## COMMUNICATING IN A CRISIS

Communication is a critical part of crisis management, which is why it's important to have a plan in place before the need arises. If your PTA belongs to a Council, notify your Council President of the crisis so that they act as an additional resource and give support during this time.

Be sensitive to confidential issues as they relate to people, policies and procedures. Anything discussed at a board meeting is confidential and not for public (or media!) consumption. Likewise for issues of missing money, board misconduct, etc. Board members are bound by the Ethics Policy that was signed at the beginning of the school year.

The first step in the plan is to designate a spokesperson. This is logically the PTA president, but they may feel unprepared for this role and may delegate that responsibility (with the board's approval). Only one person should speak with the media on a topic or situation, in order to prevent information contradiction. Be certain to follow any school district procedures before speaking with the media, and, always, keep the campus principal informed. When speaking on behalf of the PTA, the PTA spokesperson may not use his or her PTA title unless the membership has voted to take a position on the topic or the topic is covered by a previously adopted position statement or resolution of National or Texas PTA. Any personal opinion may not be expressed when speaking on behalf of the PTA or when using a PTA title.

During an interview, state the facts and tell what PTA is doing to make the situation better. Never be afraid to say, "I don't know, but I will find out and get back with you immediately." Then do just that.

It's important to follow school district procedures. Consult with the district Communications Director at the first sign of a problem. They are skilled at speaking to a crisis, much more so than a volunteer. There's no shame in directing all communications to the Communication Director in a crisis (with their consent) – better than to make the situation worse.

If the situation calls for a statement on behalf of the PTA, make sure membership has voted to take a position on the topic before speaking to it.

# FORMING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

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Different methods for forming partnerships and collaborations may be used to achieve the goal or goals of your school or PTA. The most important factor is that the partnership is a good match for the business or community group, as well as for the PTA, the school and the students.

## REASONS FOR COLLABORATING

Taking the time to build partnerships will benefit everyone in the long run. Some of the benefits include:

- Better development of programs by “pooling” resources.
- Good working relationships continue long after the “teaming up” is over.
- Common ground agendas.
- Enhanced flexibility and options.
- Wider audience on the issues.
- Greater credibility as an organization.
- Multiple networking sources and resources.
- Increased visibility of your organization.

You can broaden support of your Local or Council PTA by becoming involved in your business and civic community. Involvement and awareness promotes two-way communication and can benefit both parties.

- Attend school board meetings, city council meetings, city commission meetings, chamber of commerce functions, civic organization meetings, etc. Report back to your Local PTA on events happening in your community. Communicate your PTA events to community and civic groups.
- Discuss with employers the prospect of developing a family-friendly business program in their work site. This could be something simple like a bulletin board for employees to post student accomplishments, special honors, notices of school events, copies of Texas PTA communications, and parenting information. It could be a more involved program, such as allowing employees flextime to eat lunch with their student, or attend daytime school events or teacher conferences.
- Offer brown bag lunch programs to local businesses, industries, libraries, recreation centers and book stores on relevant and timely topics.
- After Plans of Work have been approved in the fall, put together a written presentation listing the goals of your PTA and the major activities and fundraisers that will take place during the year. List the needs that the community and businesses can help fulfill. By letting them know early in the year, they can plan ahead, make a commitment to be involved on their own terms, and not feel over-tapped for every little need you might have.
- Put together a career fair for your school, and use local business people as presenters or exhibitors.

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- Ask local businesses to provide volunteers for mentoring, tutoring or reading to classrooms or to become involved in your school's adopt-a- school program.
  - Encourage local businesses to become involved in your district's school-to-work program.
  - Encourage corporations to participate in a job- shadowing program.
  - Add local business leaders, civic leaders, church leaders and print and media news contacts to your newsletter contact list. If your newsletters go home with students, create a newsletter mail or email list, in addition to the parents in your school. Include past PTA presidents, retired teachers and senior citizen centers to keep them informed of what is going on at your school and in the district. Remember, they are a source of volunteers and are probably registered voters, voting for your school board members and bond elections.

## **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES**

- Arrange a meeting of local civic groups and discuss the possibility of forming an education coalition in the community. Coalition activities may include parenting seminars and other activities to symbolize unified support for child issues in the community.
- During election years, sponsor a community-wide educational forum to inform citizens on candidates' positions regarding education.
- Ask to speak at local civic group luncheons: chambers of commerce, Business and Professional Women, Lions, Kiwanis, Rotary, etc. Promote PTA successes and membership recruitment.
- Coordinate a meeting of local educational organizations. Allow each organization to present its position regarding educational issues, community-wide, statewide or nationwide. Invite the media to attend the forum.
- Contact community groups (social services, churches, scouts, civic organizations, etc.) to co- sponsor community/child safety issues, such as before-and after-school childcare, neighborhood watches, trick-or-treating, etc.
- Put together a PTA exhibit to display at the local library, in a local bookstore, at a chamber of commerce function or in your school. Tie the exhibit to an event such as membership recruitment month (September), Volunteer Appreciation Week (April) or Founder's Day (February 17).
- Get involved in your local chamber of commerce, serving on education-related committees and function.

# RESOURCES

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Texas PTA is committed to providing our volunteer leaders across the state with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in their role within PTA. Access to quality educational resources is a key component in supporting this success, as well as continuing to build strong Local and Council PTAs.

## FOUNDATIONS

*FOUNDATIONS* courses provide a broad overview of “what” PTA is, and share important information that every PTA leader should know. In addition to the courses offered for all board members, Texas PTA has also created a series of brief *FOUNDATIONS* courses that provide general information for many Local PTA board positions. It is important to note that these position-specific courses are not meant to be comprehensive training, rather a quick review of each position for newly-elected or prospective nominees. Other than *FOUNDATIONS: Leader Orientation*, all *FOUNDATIONS* courses are web-based presentations.

### ALL BOARD MEMBERS

- Council PTA Board Orientation
- Inclusiveness
- Leader Orientation
- Local PTA Board Orientation

### POSITION SPECIFIC

- Arts in Education
- Communications
- Environmental Awareness
- Fundraising
- Healthy Lifestyles
- Historian
- Legislative Action
- Membership
- Parent Education Programs
- Parliamentarian
- President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Volunteer Coordinator

## BASICS

The *BASICS* series contains detailed information to support volunteer leaders in their specific board position. Texas PTA strongly encourages every board member to attend a *BASICS* course for their own position, as well as any other related positions.

*BASICS* courses are currently available for face-to-face presentations during LAUNCH and through your Council PTA or Field Service Representative, as well as scheduled web-based trainings hosted by Texas PTA. In addition to the training presentation, all *BASICS* courses have a companion Resource Guide, Quick-Start Guide, and Duties-at-a-Glance. These guides are available via download from the Texas PTA website or for purchase through Texas PTA’s STAR Co-op (online store). Courses marked with an asterisk (\*) will debut at a future date.

- Arts Education
- Communications
- Environmental Awareness\*
- Fundraising
- Healthy Lifestyles
- Legislative Action
- Membership
- Parent Education / Programs
- Parliamentarian
- President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Volunteer Coordinator

## SPOTLIGHTS

PTAs have many unique programs, processes and responsibilities as healthy, thriving non-profits. *SPOTLIGHTS* courses offer an in-depth review of some of these most important and recurring PTA functions.

*SPOTLIGHTS* courses are available during LAUNCH and through on-demand, web-based presentations hosted by Texas PTA.

- Bylaws and Standing Rules
- Conducting a Meeting
- Financial Reconciliation
- Nominations and Elections

# CONTACTS

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\$7.50



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